THE STUDY OF LITERATURE.

Inaugural Lecture

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BY

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THE STUDY OF LITERATURE.

THIS chair, of which I have the honor to be the first incumbent, is officially entitled the Chair of English, and includes, therefore, two very important and distinct, though connected subjects, English Literature and English Language. It is to the former that I intend to direct your attention to-day; not that I am disposed to undervalue the second of these subjects; on the contrary, of such importance do I deem it, that I hope the day may come when there will be in this University a chair devoted entirely to the English Language. But in the scheme of that liberal culture which is the aim of college training, I think it will not be questioned that English Literature is the more essential and more important of the two. If I mistake not, this chair is regarded primarily as a chair of English Litrature by the University authorities as well as by the general public of this province. As therefore, it is impossible within the limits of this inaugural lecture to treat both divisions satisfactorily, I will confine myself on the present occasion to the subject which I consider it to be my main business here to teach, viz., to Literature.

Perhaps there is no subject or study in which there is a more general and widely diffused interest than in literature. All who read, and they in our day and generation constitute a very numerous and varied class, are in so far students of literature. It is partly for this very reason, from the fact that so many ill-trained and half-trained minds are in some measure devoted to its pursuit, that the aims and methods of literary culture are so generally misapprehended. The popularizing of a subject brings the claims of mediocrity to the forefront, and there follows the inevitable attempt to find some easy mechanical method whereby the secret of literary enjoyment and literary culture may be attained. Men adopt the method, and ignorant of the true outcome of literary training, are unconscious that they miss the aim. Perhaps, for example, the aspirant to culture conscientiously wades through a supposed authoritative list of the one hundred best books. He completes his tale, the incongruous selection of individual caprice—the Iliad, the Koran, Don Quixote, Sartor Resartus and so on—without one moment of keen literary enjoyment, unthrilled by a single passage, with scarce an iota of permanent result in the shape of intellectual openness, flexibility, and polish which literature ought to give. He has won only the self contentment and self satisfaction of the sciolist, the worst outcome of that dangerous thing, a little knowledge. It is not the reading of many books, be they one hundred or one thousand, but the manner in which they are read that is essential. One play of Shakespeare pro-

perly studied and properly appreciated will do more for literary culture than countless books, however excellent, read as most people read them. I think it very necessary therefore that, in entering on our work together, we should come to an understanding as to the aim of our studies, and the results which we expect to flow from them, and as to the methods by which these results are likely to be best attained.

The term literature, like most others, is ambiguous in its use, and susceptible of a wider or of a narrower meaning. If we take it in its widest sense, in the sense sanctioned by its etymology, literature is written thought. Anything written, provided it is not a mere jumble of words or letters, but represents some idea, belongs to the domain of literature. Of the infinite thoughts which have swept in ceaseless streams through the numberless minds of successive generations, a few were recorded, and of these again, a few are still preserved in written language. This is our material, be the nature of the ideas and the form of the expression what they may. Not merely the stately epic, the elaborate philosophical treatise, but the familiar letter, the monumental inscription, the scribbled sentences on Pompeiian walls, form a part of the literature of the world. So that we may find ourselves concerned not only with such works as "The Iliad" or "Lear," but with others like "Euclid's Elements," or Darwin's "Origin of Species," whose claim to the title of literature would be less

generally admitted. In periods fertile of books, it is true, the purely literary student gives such works scant attention, but in more barren times he is glad enough to consider them. The historian of Early English Literature readily admits the baldest statements of facts, and does not scruple to dignify the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the Laws of Ine with the name of Literature.

Since, then, literature includes all sorts of books, philosophical, historical, scientific, and so on, we must next ask, how is the work of the student of literature differentiated from that of the philosopher, or historian? It is evident he is concerned with books only in so far as they are literature, *i.e.*, only so far as they are the expression of thought. One book may be intended to enlarge the bounds of philosophical knowledge, another to teach political economy, and in so far the aim of one book and one writer differs from that of another. But this much they all have in common, they are all representative of certain phases of thought and feeling in the mind of the writer, and it is his intention to reproduce these phases in the minds of others. It is the business of the student of literature to realize that intention. The written symbols are before him; it is for him to reproduce within himself the mental condition to which these symbols correspond. His work is simply that of interpretation. The scientific man reads the "Origin of Species" mainly to get at the truth which it may contain or suggest. The literary student, as such, stops short of that; it is his peculiar

business to determine what exactly Darwin meant. So it is, that we students of literature are interested in all departments of thought, and yet stand apart from and outside of all. Let us suppose, for example, that we are sceptical of the utility of philosophic discussion, as such, think metaphysics a fruitless wrangle. Yet that does not prevent us, in the course of our study of the literature of England in the 18th century, from being deeply interested in the works of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. We set ourselves to determine just what these treatises of theirs contain and mean, not necessarily because we suppose they will afford any substantial philosophical result, but because we want to know what men have thought, because of the insight we gain into the character of these writers, and of the age and nation in which they lived.

It must not, however, be granted that, because the work of the student of literature is thus limited to interpretation, it is thereby adjudged to be unsatisfactory or superficial. Interpretation in its fullest sense gives, as I hope to show before I close, abundant scope for the highest exercise of our faculties, and leads to the profoundest investigation of human nature. At times, indeed, our task is comparatively easy. Euclid writes: "Two straight lines which are parallel to the same straight line, are parallel to one another," and this is a proposition whose terms we have merely to comprehend, in order to attain Euclid's point of view in writing it. But if we turn, for example, to the works of Herodotus, we find numerous stories whose terms in-

deed are not less easily comprehended than those of Euclid, but which strike us as childish or incredible. In merely understanding their purport have we reproduced Herodotus's state of mind in writing them? Did the stories seem childish or incredible to him? The question calls for literary investigation. The student must examine the whole work of Herodotus, and determine its general scope. He finds that it professes to be a serious history, and comes to the conclusion, perhaps, that Herodotus gives the narratives under consideration in all seriousness and good faith. Still he does not understand the author's state of mind in writing the passage. How came a man of evident intellectual power and culture to believe fables whose absurdity is manifest to the school boy of to-day? To answer this question the student betakes himself to the study of Greek history and Greek modes of thought: and until he has thrown himself into Hellenic life of the fifth century and grasped Herodotus's relation to the civilization of his time, he will not have attained the aim of literary study, the reproduction in one's self of the writer's state of mind. Or again, before we can be said to understand the Dialogues of Plato, we have many problems to solve. In the Socrates here represented, did Plato intend to give a picture of the historic Socrates? In how far are the opinions put in Socrates's mouth held by the author himself? What is the explanation of the manifest fallacies which occasionally mar the reasoning of the dialogues? In answering the last question the student learns how the intellectual power even of a

Plato is subject to the limitations of his time, and unable, without the assistance of a formulated logic, to escape the snare of simple fallacies, and how the study of a language other than the native tongue was needful to enable men to distinguish between the thing and its name. Such enquiries as these give the positive results of literary work. How necessary these preliminary determinations are in order that the works of Herodotus and Plato may be used by the historian and philosopher respectively, is sufficiently apparent. So in all departments of study, written authorities must be submitted to the crucible of higher criticism (as it is called) before they may be safely and profitably employed. We may realize the importance of such work by recalling the fact that the most interesting and one of the most active provinces of the higher criticism in our day is the canon of the Old and New Testaments. The revision of the Authorized Version is an attempt by literary students to determine more exactly what the various sacred authors actually said; while the recent discussion between Professors Wace and Huxley has drawn popular attention to the unprecedented activity of scholars in determining the authenticity, dates, and relations of the various books of the Bible.

With the increasing of these positive results, however we, in our course, have but little to do. Literature is with us an instrument of culture, and culture comes not from the results of investigation, but from the process. In the process of literary investigation, as we have seen, it is sometimes necessary for us to grasp the

spirit of a nation or of an age. At other times, we must find our solution in the individual character of a writer. It may be, for example, that on comparing the works of Thucydides with those of the almost contemporary Herodotus, we should conclude that the peculiarities of the latter's history are due, not so much to the times, as to the personal character of the author himself. Thus the study of literature becomes the study of human nature under varying conditions. Its fundamental requisite is, that the student should escape from himself, his own narrow conceptions and surroundings, that he should sympathize with, so far as to understand (for understanding postulates sympathy) men of very different character, in times and countries, perhaps, remote from his, with feelings and modes of thought even more remote. In no other pursuit is he in contact with such a variety of ideas, in no other study has he to make them so thoroughly his own. He has not done with them, as the scientific student, when he ascertains that they are false; he must comprehend their genesis, and how, though false, they once seemed true, whether the explanation lies in the writer or in his age. He becomes at home and at ease among ideas, as is the man of the world among men. As those qualities which characterize the man of the world are acquired through intercourse with men of various types, and not through intercourse simply, but through being obliged to use and to manipulate them; so the analogous discipline of literature gives the analogous qualities of intellectual openness and flexibility, which in turn

beget a tolerance and coolness of judgment especially characteristic of thorough culture. The student of science comes into contact with facts; interrogated nature says that a thing is so or not so. The student of literature comes into contact with ideas, moulded to the mind which formulated them, intermixed with error and modified by emotion. He is under the necessity of comprehending how the form of a conception is the result of character and surroundings. He learns to do this in books of a more or less remote past, often treating questions in which he has no immediate interest, and which he can therefore view with coolness and impartiality. Having acquired this habit of mind in a remote sphere, he is rendered capable of maintaining it in examining the burning questions of the day. Here, too, he analyses and makes allowance. He comprehends the relativity of truth, the inevitable limitations of the human intellect, the common obliquity of mental vision which afflicts whole generations. The novelty or apparent absurdity of an idea does not repel him. He is ready to investigate the grounds of an opinion with which he does not agree, and the residuum of truth which forms the basis of most errors, will not improbably serve to render his own conceptions more just. His comprehension of his opponent's position enables him to attack it more effectively, and to hold his own more surely. Were we absolutely fixed in relation to all objects, the visible world would appear to us a flat surface. Not less necessary is it that in the intellectual world we should be capable of assum-

ing different points of view. To the man of undisciplined mind, nothing is more difficult. The presentation of the other side of a question causes him an uneasy feeling of insecurity and irritation. To him moral obliquity seems the necessary source of opinions differing from his own. The men in Gay's fable who disputed about the color of the chameleon, afford a typical example of the state of mind from which literary discipline tends to set us free. Not chameleons alone, but political questions, social questions, religious questions, present different aspects under different circumstances. Here, then, are two great results which may be expected to flow from all genuine literary training—first, openness of mind, that is, a readiness to admit ideas however strange, and to comprehend and accept whatever of truth they contain: secondly, flexibility of mind, the capacity to seize a point of view not our own, to understand other men and other times,—what, in short, we may call intellectual sympathy.

You will note that these qualities of mind are developed by the intellectual gymnastics of seizing the ideas of others, of putting ourselves at their standpoint. Hence they are results that follow from the study of everything that can be called literature, however little inherent excellence it may possess. But we have further to consider the study of literature in its narrower, higher, and perhaps more usual, sense. All presentation of thought which has maintained permanent vitality, possesses a certain power, fitness, or beauty of expression; for, as thought when once expressed becomes

common property, mankind naturally cares to preserve the words, not of him who expressed it first, but of him who expressed it best. In these treasured utterances we have not the mere colourless presentation of an idea, or of an objective fact; there is an additional element of form impressed by the writer, and the literary student finds here wide scope for the interpretative function. The entering completely into the thought of an author was in the case of purely objective statements, such as those of Euclid, a simple matter. In Herodotus the interest and difficulty of our task were increased by the introduction of a subjective element. And, in general, it is true that the less purely objective the thought is, and the more the author impresses on it his personality, his emotions,—sets it before us, not exactly as it is, but as it appears to him, the more does the student of literature find himself concerned with it. This subjective factor in literature makes itself generally felt through the manner, the form; and the most pervading manifestation of form is style Style is that in the written thought which corresponds to the personality of the writer, and is the outcome of that personality. Two narratives may, as you are well aware, affect the reader very differently, although the framework of fact in each case may be the same. The difference in effect cannot result from the matter; it arises from the manner or style; and that, in turn, comes from the attitude of the writer toward the facts, an attitude which he reproduces in his reader. As that attitude may be analyzed into two

elements, the permanent element of character, and the transient element of mood; so style, reflecting the varying mood of the writer, is pathetic, or humorous, or indignant; and yet, behind all that, there is a constant element of individual characteristics which serves to distinguish one author from another, and to which we refer in speaking of the style of Demosthenes or of Virgil, of Burke, or of Milton. "*Le style*," says the adage, "*c'est l'homme.*" The genuine stylist depicts himself to the competent literary critic, with unconscious fidelity, in lineaments adequate and unmistakeable.

Through style, then, we come in contact with that which is greatest in man, character,—that unity of tendency and impression which springs from all his moral and intellectual forces. Those who have been fortunate enough to encounter in life a great and noble personality, know that it is the most inspiring and marvellous of spiritual forces. As the chord in one instrument responds to the vibrations of its fellow in another, so the emotions of the human soul vibrate under the influence of a great and ardent character. But in the limitations of time, and space, and circumstance, by which our lives are bound, such encounters must needs be rare; and fortunate it is that through literature we are able to feel the kindling spiritual presence of the mighty dead. It is true that but few can thus transmit themselves through the ages; but these few are among the greatest spirits of our race. The power of style in the highest degree is the prerogative of genius alone. When style

in that highest degree is present, we are not merely told how the writer felt, but his feelings are communicated to us; not how he saw, but we are enabled to see as he did; not what manner of man he was, but we are introduced into his very presence. In the sphere of studies, I know nothing comparable to this. History and biography tell us about men, we see them imaged in a more or less imperfect medium; but here we feel the thrill of their emotions, the power of their presence. So that, not only does literature bring us into contact with ideas, the higher literature brings us into contact with men, the choice and master spirits of all ages. Here is a society ever open to us, the best and most desirable we can conceive, the truest aristocracy of the human race in their happiest moods, with their wisest and deepest thoughts on their lips.

It is in no figurative sense, but in sober truth, that I call this "society." From what has been said of style, it is manifest that the influence of a great work on a competent literary capacity does not differ in kind from the influence of personal contact. If somewhat is lost in vividness, many of the limitations of personal converse are absent. But if in the best literature we find, in no merely hyperbolical sense, "society," it is like all good society, difficult of access. Not much of worth in this world but is the reward of merit, of toil, of patience. The gardens of the Hesperides stood ever open, but to fetch the golden apples was the labour of a Hercules. The books are waiting on the shelves, but he is far astray indeed who thinks to win the secret of Goethe, of Shakespeare, of him—

" Who saw life steadily and saw it whole,
The mellow glory of the Attic stage,"

in the same easy fashion in which he skims through the last popular novel, or an ephemeral essay of the periodical press. To experience the power of literature, to appreciate style in its fulness, to feel not merely the main emotion but the whole complex of emotions with which a writer regards his subject, is the outcome only of constant and careful study, combined with a large innate susceptibility to literary art. Though the capacity for the highest literary appreciation is not common, in most men a measure of innate capability is dormant. To rouse this dormant capability, to guide it aright when roused, to teach the proper spirit in which to approach the masterpieces of literature, and to keep the mind in contact with them, this should form a main part of every course of literature; and I claim that, excluding the other benefits of college work, it would be no inadequate return, should the student gain this alone, the appreciation of what is noblest and best in books, and a love for that august company of whom we have spoken.

Style is the most pervading manifestation of form. We find it present when the literary structure is not otherwise elaborated. Thucydides's History, for example, has the simple mould of a chronicle of events narrated year after year, as they occurred. Its style, however, is very marked; the character of the writer is felt throughout, and, with consummate skill, he bathes such narratives as those of plague at Athens or the

Sicilian Expedition in a certain emotional atmosphere. But an author may not merely impress his character and mood upon his matter, he may shape that matter itself to the production of certain effects. Here we reach literature in its purest form,—literature which is literature first of all, not history, or science, or philosophy. In it the writer's aim is primarily artistic, the embodiment of a beautiful conception in appropriate language. Of this species, there are several varieties, but we may take poetry as the best and highest representative. The poet is in the fullest sense creative; the subjective factor reaches its maximum; and hence poetry is, in an especial degree, the subject of the student of literature. In Euclid we have, as near as may be, the colourless presentation of fact. In Thucydides the main object is still the presentation of fact, though it is colored by emotion. Poetry, on the other hand, is differentiated from these in that the production of emotion is here the chief aim, in subordination to which the facts themselves are chosen and moulded. As by its form, then, so by its aim, poetry is the highest species of literature. For the highest manifestations of human nature are emotional. Emotion raises morality to religion. Nay more, the work of Christianity itself was to introduce the reign of emotion, to substitute for the tribunal of an unchanging code, the arbitrament of an inner and over progressive emotional state.

The stimulation of noble and pleasing emotions is the aim of the poet. But emotion cannot exist by itself; it is merely the form, the garb in which some-

thing more substantial is clothed by the mind; and this substance, in the case of all great and abiding artistic work, is truth. No art, no beauty of expression can give more than a temporary hold on the minds of the race to what is fundamentally untrue. Enduring works of imagination are not fiction in the sense of being false; on the contrary, they are truer embodiments of observation and insight than the vast majority of mankind can arrive at for themselves. There is much false fiction in the world, doubtless, giving misleading ideas of men and things,—enough to afford some ground to the old-fashioned prejudice against reading novels. But falsity is neither a necessary characteristic of fiction, nor a consequence of the unreality of the persons and events which works of imagination usually present. Falsity can no more be invariably attributed to what is called fiction, than truth to what is called history. Indeed, I know not if the sum total of truth contained in English fiction be not greater than the sum total of truth contained in English history. The greatest English novelist of the last century mockingly called his works histories, and in the introductions which he prefixed to the divisions of one of them, humorously vindicates their claim to truth in comparison with works usually so denominated. And the claim is not without justification. In the eighteenth century, Fielding attempted to give a picture of English social life as it was, Hume of English political life as it had been; beyond question Fielding's is the truer work, as time has shown it to be the more enduring. Each

generation of Englishmen finds it necessary to re-write the history of England; each generation of scholars the histories of Greece and Rome; for each sees the inadequacy of its predecessors' attempts. That inadequacy lies not in the incompetence of the writers, but in the complexity of their subject and in the insufficiency of their data. That an historian should give us in detail an absolutely true picture of the actual Brutus, on existing data, is an impossibility. But Shakespeare, like the geometrician, makes his own hypothesis. He ascribes a certain character to Brutus, and represents him as influenced by certain men and certain circumstances, so that the assassination of Cæsar is the natural and inevitable outcome. The representation is absolutely true, not as a picture of the historic Brutus,—that it is not the business of the poet to give—but of universal human nature, of how certain characters would have acted under the influence of certain surroundings. The truth of the picture comes from the poet's control over his facts, as the unvarying exactness of geometrical deductions comes from the arbitrary nature of the fundamental assumptions. In a certain sense, truth may be denied to the results of geometry, inasmuch as they have no exact correlatives in the real world; while in another sense they possess the highest truth, and when applied to the concrete universe, as in astronomy, give results the most accurate attained by science. There is a certain analogy to this in the work of the poet. The truths of history and biography are at best particular; to apply

them to life, we must generalize them. The representations of poetry, on the other hand, have an element of universality. Shakespeare's men and women are, as Coleridge says, embodiments of the universal, individualizations of the type; and consequently possess validity everywhere and for all time.

But it is not merely truth of the historic type,—pictures of human action and character,—that poetry presents. It presents also truths of a scientific or philosophic nature. Unlike science and philosophy, however, poetry, aiming mainly at emotion, confines itself to a certain range of truths fitted to kindle this, and is more concerned with the manner in which they are expressed than with their novelty. Indeed they are the old fundamental truths, the patrimony of the race, intertwined with all our inherited instincts, that poetry treats by preference; for these are most deeply rooted in our emotional nature. Novel truths, on the other hand, it rather shuns; the intellectual effort in grasping them, and the lack of unquestioned certainty which attends them, are fatal to emotional absorption. The novelty of poetry therefore lies in its form, rather than in its material. Poetry owes its power to its manner, in virtue of which it transmutes dead terms apprehended by the intellect only, into living convictions grasped by the whole moral nature, which vibrates responsive to them. The difference is illustrated by the analogous contrast in the sphere of religion, between the cold assent of reason and the warm embrace of faith. Ac-

cordingly, the difference between the poetic and scientific presentation of truth, though merely one of manner, is immeasurably great. To give a glimpse of this, allow me to present an example or two of the same facts stated scientifically and poetically. In a scientific work, you might perhaps find some such statement as this: "The extinction of man and of all that he has produced is assured by the action of certain forces on the terrestrial globe, which must ultimately result in the destruction of that body and its return to its primitive nebulous condition." Shakespeare expresses the same idea:

> "And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
> The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
> And like this insubstantial pageant faded
> Leave not a wrack behind. We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep."

Again in the closing chapter of the First Book of Samuel, we find an historic statement of certain facts:

> "Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines, and fell down slain in Mount Gilboa. And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his son; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadad, and Melchishua, Saul's sons," and so forth."

In the following chapter this narrative is fused into form and beauty by the glowing emotion and imagination of the poet David:

"And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son. The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places; how are the mighty fallen! Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph. Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be any rain upon you, nor fields of offerings; for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil. Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. How are the mighty fallen in the midst of battle! Oh, Jonathan, thou wast slain in thy high places! I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been to me; thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty fallen and the weapons of war perished!"

Thus in poetry we do not stand outside the thoughts and characters presented, we enter into them; not merely the range of our knowledge is widened, but the range of our experience, through that sympathy with emotion which it is the essence of poetry to kindle. To us in the somewhat narrowing conditions of our daily lives, such stimulus and expansion are especially necessary. Our surroundings and education are wont to leave neglected the aesthetic side of our nature, and except in literature, we have scarcely any means for its cultivation. In this land, the young and ardent spirit cannot find food for ideal aspiration in the masterpieces of Phidias, or of Praxiteles, of Raphael, or of Titian. Our College towns are not Oxfords; nor can we feel the serene and majestic calm which clings about the Cathedrals of England and Normandy, or the towers and basilicas of Tuscany. In our native Province we grow to manhood un-

touched by, and for the most part, ignorant of, the educating power of plastic art. Perhaps the very building in which we stand, has been the first to waken in us that elevating sense of beauty and repose which architecture can give. The more need then, in the dearth of other means of aesthetic culture, that we should have recourse to literature, which is fortunately, at once, the widest, most efficient, and most easily appreciated of artistic forces. Our aesthetic sensibilities form a part of our own nature which liberal culture can by no means afford to overlook. On the individual or nation which neglects or represses them, they exact vengeance in narrowness of intellect or morals. The world's history has more than once shown, that when the higher emotions are stifled, the lower assert themselves, and plunge society into an orgie of sensuality, such as followed the iron rule of Puritanism in England. And not merely for itself is beautiful emotion desirable. Aristotle, long ago, noted its purifying effects on the mind. It cannot, of course, be denied that aesthetic sensibility may co-exist with weak moral character, and that fine feeling does not necessarily lead to noble action ; yet its general elevating tendency is none the less real. The soul vibrating in sympathy with the great deeds and lofty character, the soul touched with the sense of human sorrow and human guilt, whether in nature or art can, for the time at least, find no pleasure in anything that is ignoble or degrading. And if the study of poetry is an emotional discipline and a moral force,

it is no less an intellectual discipline and practical aid. "The highest poetry," Matthew Arnold says, "is at bottom a criticism of life, and the greatness of a poet lies in the beautiful and powerful application of ideas to life, to the question—how to live." It is the business of science to attain truth, of poetry, to seize that truth in as far as it is applicable to life, and to give it perfect expression. Hence Wordsworth has called poetry "the impassioned expression which is the countenance of all science;" and again, "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge." It is in virtue of this side of his work that the poet is a philosopher and comes to the assistance of the thoughtful spirit craving an answer to the great problems of life. Philosophy or metaphysics attempts to solve these, but studies so profound and technical require special intellectual endowments, and must ever remain the sphere of the few. Yet any solution to which the unaided individual can attain, will inevitably be narrow and eccentric. It must be broadened from every source at command; and not least, in literature is to be found a treasure house of aid—suggestions, the more stimulating that they are but suggestions; partial solutions the more enduring that they are but partial, and sometimes where we least expect it, a complete philosophy implicit. So that in poetry we find not only a fountain of beauty, whence we may drain perpetual draughts of joy, but a store house of wisdom, whence we may draw treasures new and old, and arm ourselves with weapons for the battle of life.

Thus far we have considered the results—the discipline, the knowledge, the enjoyment—which we are to look for in the study of literature. It remains that I indicate succinctly the method by which these results are to be attained. It has been made sufficiently evident, in the previous part of this address, that our studies must primarily and chiefly have to do with the great works of literature themselves, not with facts about them or their authors, nor with the judgment of critics concerning them. If we wish to cultivate our musical taste, we must hear good music ; if we wish to understand and enjoy painting and sculpture, we must see good painting and sculpture. And it is both logical and natural to acquire some interest in, and acquaintance with literature, before we enter the history of literature. Yet it is no uncommon practice, in the teaching of this subject, to begin with the names, dates, and authors of books of which the student has perhaps not read a word, and in which consequently, he has no intelligent interest. He is made to recite glibly criticisms of whose justice he can form no possible judgment, lacking the first of all requirements, acquaintance with their object. On the other hand, if we follow the natural method, we cannot be wrong ; and it is a fact that men of aptitude for literature all acquire their love and knowledge of literature in the same way. They become interested in certain books ; then their curiosity is awakened with regard to the

authors, and the circumstances amidst which the books were produced. They are led from the study of particular works to the study of writers, and periods, *i.e.*, to the history of literature. The development of interest and understanding, however, is the earlier, the more difficult, and by far the more important task. If a teacher is successful in making a student conscious in some adequate measure of the excellence of a single great work—"Hamlet," or "Lycidas," or "Waverley," or "Tintern Abbey," he has done infinitely more for that student than if he had made him a complete encyclopædia of the facts with regard to all books in the English language from Cædmon to Tennyson. The man who has, in any adequate measure, been made sensible of the beauty and power of any great work, has had the love of literature kindled in him, and has learnt the secret of literary interpretation.

It is at this stage,—when we have the works before us,—that we can first make profitable use of the criticisms of others. Such criticisms are not dogmas to be adopted, but helps to the directing of our own eyes, and the awakening of deeper insight into that which we have already read. In making use of critical helps we should, however, be on our guard against the common error of losing sight of the whole in the study of the parts. Too often the main end—the enjoyment and comprehension of a great work, is lost sight of in the excessive explanation of phrases and allusions. It is of course essential to accurate scholarship and honest thinking that the meaning of

each word and phrase as used by the author should be understood. It is not, however, essential that the history and etymology of a word should be explained, except in so far as light is thereby thrown on the use of the word in the passage under consideration. When the student comes to the Miltonic line :

"Who left untold
The story of Cambuscan Bold"

it is proper that he should know that it was Chaucer who did this, and that the circumstances of the story being untold should be explained. It is out of place and distracting that he should have foisted upon him an outline of Chaucer's life and works, and a discussion of Cambuscan, mythical and real. I have heard that a professor of English, when asked for counsel by a student as to his reading during the vacation, recommended that he should read Macaulay's Essays, making himself fully acquainted, as he went along, with every person, place, or thing mentioned. The suggestion as to reading Macaulay may have been excellent; but think of the proper names and allusions scattered so thickly over his Essays, and judge, not how many essays, but how many paragraphs the student would have mastered. At the close of the summer, instead of knowing anything of Macaulay, or the subject of an essay, he would have crammed into his brain a farrago of miscellaneous, ill-digested, superficial information. Even this information could not, in most cases, be lasting. The mature mind prefers that its

facts and ideas should be acquired in large masses of logically connected material. The miscellaneous knowledge obtained in notes remains in the student's mind till the examination is passed, and then for the most part gradually evaporates.

Having warned you against this Scylla of literary study, let me caution you, on the other hand, against the Charybdis of slovenliness and inaccuracy. The student of literature, perhaps more than others, is tempted to dilettanteism, too apt to be satisfied with a species of passive enjoyment, prone to overlook the claims of accuracy and thoroughness. Experience in my own case, and observation in that of others, has taught me that it is a great mistake to study in a subject just what we care for and what is pleasant to us. Thoroughness and completeness lend interest in time to the dryest subjects, but slovenliness and self-pleasing are fatal to it. We owe a debt of gratitude to examinations, much as it is the fashion to abuse them, for the safeguards they erect against this kind of study. Remember that we, inside the University, are scholars, not amateurs, and thoroughness is the first characteristic of the true scholar.

The enjoyment and understanding of literature—the fundamental requisite of the literary student—has accidentally originated in various men through the perusal of very different books, as tastes and circumstances may have determined. In College classes, where individual preference cannot be consulted, and where students have attained considerable maturity, I believe

that in the dramas of Shakespeare we find the best instruments for awakening genuine literary taste, and for the desciplining of that which has been already awakened. The works of Shakespeare are to be preferred, not merely on account of their surpassing greatness, but also because we find in them a breadth of knowledge and sympathy which gives points of contact and interest for men of the most diverse capacities and temperaments. Other writers appeal to a more or less narrow circle, Shakespeare to all men. There are men, not merely of intellectual ability, but of considerable literary aptitude, to whom Wordsworth is a sealed book. One is blind to the excellence of Pope, another to that of Spenser. Even a man of Matthew Arnold's pre-eminent literary insight fails to do justice to Shelley. But if a student has any aptitude for literature whatever, and even if he has none, he may usually be made to perceive on some side the greatness of Shakespeare; so multitudinous and striking are the excellences of that most human and universal of writers. Having acquired some insight into Shakespeare, we ought in the same way to make an accurate study of, and learn to enjoy a considerable number of our greatest and most typical English writers. The more diverse these are in genius, the more complete and adequate will the student's training and culture be.

But our University studies must not stop here. This is merely the first, though the most important and most difficult, stage. When we have read a book with interest, when it has been a source of keen enjoyment

and stimulus, when it has widened our horizon, we then naturally wish to know something of its author and the circumstances of its production. This, indeed, as I explained at the opening, is a necessary factor in the complete understanding of a book. We are thus led from the study of single works to the study of writers,—from books to men. But again, we find it is not sufficient merely to master a man's collective writings and the details of his life. To complete our understanding of the work, or our conception of the writer, we must know something of the intellectual atmosphere which surrounded him, of the currents of thought, and the of spirit of his time. In doing this, we pass from the study of the individual writer to the study of the period in which he lived—to the history of literature. Arrived at this stage, we find that books and authors, possessing but little in themselves to merit our attention, have now, as links in the chain of literary development, a new interest and importance through their influence upon greater writers, and through the insight which they afford into the current thought of the age. Thus, starting from single authors, with a desire of fully understanding their works, and of forming a complete and true likeness of them as men, we find a new conception and a new aim dawning upon us—the conception of the solidarity of literature, the aim of forming a complete image of the thought of an age in all its manifold relations. As a writer unconsciously reveals himself in his work, so a nation, at each epoch of its history,

reveals itself in its collective literary products. As one's knowledge and insight deepen, all books, all writers assume their proper places in the picture; great currents of thought, obscure streams of influence, the manifold relations of thinkers, the action and reaction of thought become manifest, and the whole adjusts itself in fitting perspective. But this picture is still incomplete unless we follow backward and forward the lines of development, and see the passing phenomena in their relation to their antecedents and their results. We thus arrive at our final task, as students of English literature at least—the task of tracing out and imaging the development of national thought from the time when it first emerges from the obscurity of an illiterate and pre-historic past, to its culmination in the multidinuous streams of literary activity amidst which we ourselves live.

You see, then, in brief what practical course we ought to take. First, we must awaken and discipline literary taste by the study of individual works. Next, this taste should be widened by a thorough knowledge of the best works of the greatest writers. Thirdly, we must make the literature of a period our subject, study minutely its leading works, familiarize ourselves with its chief writers by reading, to some extent, their less important works also, and widen our knowledge of the literature of the period by a course of reading among secondary authors. It is impossible and undesirable, however, that the ordinary student should spend much time on books which have merely

an historical interest. So that, at this point in his course, he may profitably make use of abstracts and criticisms of books which he himself has not been able to read. These facts and opinions have now a genuine interest for him, through the relations which minor works bear to the general course of literary development. Thus, having mastered the literature of one or two periods, and knowing something of the great literature of all periods, it would be well, in the fourth place, (if time precludes such detailed examination of the whole of English Literature,) that the student should have put before him a brief sketch of the entire development of our Literature, so that all that he has learned, or will learn, may fall into its fitting place in the scheme of the whole.

I have thus completed a brief exposition of the main results which may be expected to spring from the study of literature, and a still briefer indication of the proper method of attaining them. If in urging its importance, I have maintained its superiority in some respects to other subjects, it is in no spirit of disparagement to these, for I well know that they in their turn afford a discipline which literature cannot give. The place I claim for literature among her sister studies is a high one, and can be filled by none of them; but culture is broader than literature, and as the curriculum of this University indicates, a truly liberal culture must be many sided. Again, I have

represented the results of literary study in their highest manifestations—have set up an ideal towards which we must strive. But the laws of the universe are mostly realized in tendencies, and if our studies only *tend* to bring about the results indicated, we must not be discouraged but work patiently towards a more perfect realization. Nor have I urged the cause of literature in any narrow sense. What I have said is applicable, not merely to English Literature but to all literature. Especially do I acknowledge here the claims of classical literature, which seems to me, if pursued in a proper spirit, especially fitted to produce that openness and flexibility of mind and soundness of judgment of which I spoke in the earlier part of this lecture. Valuable above all is the literature of Greece, whether we regard its variety, its perfection of form, its wealth of ideas, its unique development, or its abiding force in moulding the thought of Western Europe. On the other hand, the various modern literatures are much more quickly and easily accessible, and come nearer to us in thought and feeling. According to taste and temperament, one student will feel himself attracted to that of Germany, another to that of France, or of Italy. But, after all, the wide, varied and splendid literature open to all of us in our mother tongue, is a sufficient instrument of literary culture, and from it at any rate we must begin. Literary taste and love of books must be developed there. None of us will be disposed, I think, to differ from Professor Huxley when he gives utterance to the

remark with which I will close: "If an Englishman cannot get literary culture out of his Bible, his Shakespeare, his Milton, neither will the profoundest study of Homer and Sophocles, Virgil and Horace, give it to him."